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MARK TWAIN'S LETTERS. Arranged with comment by Albert Bigelow Paine. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1917.

The chief interest of Mark Twain's letters is not, of course, an informational interest, but a literary interest. For a clear, connected, and fully adequate story of Mark Twain's life, with a sufficient flavor of his own style and his own opinions, one would turn of course to the admirable biography by Mr. Paine.

Lovers of Mark Twain need not be told that every line that he ever wrote is stamped with the mark of his mind, that characteristic quality of style that simply in itself gives joy by its vigor, its humor, and its poetry. In one of the earliest letters of his that has been preserved, one finds him describing a number of men whose clothing had become coated with ice as resembling "rock candy statuary." Much later in an equally striking phrase he declares that when he chose the artist Beard to illustrate *A Connecticut Yankee at King Arthur's Court* he had "gone netting for lightning bugs and caught a meteor." It is idle to pile up examples of this verbal felicity, essentially poetic but with the unanalyzable element of humor added. It is enough to say that instances of it abound in the letters, and that in consequence one at least of Mark Twain's literary qualities is as fully available in these as in anything he ever wrote.

But, always admitting that we may get sufficiently acquainted with the man through his biography, what reason is there, if any, for putting the letters of Mark Twain on a level with the best of what he wrote for publication? Mark Twain, it has been said, was a better artist than philosopher, and a better philosopher than thinker. If, then, he was not a profound thinker, why should his letters deserve more than the amount of interest which affection for the man as revealed in his formal works can inspire? For surely letters are inferior as works of art to narratives, tales, and essays.

To this there can be but one reply. Every true lover of Mark Twain's writings is ready to maintain that in a very true sense this great humorist and story teller was a profound thinker. It may be safely admitted, perhaps, that he was not a great logician or a great scholar. But he was profound, as poets are profound. He expressed fundamental things in human terms; he was elemental. Thus, in his mind, moods, fancies, intuitions, affections, opinions and those guesses that we call convictions, attained a clearness, an adequacy of expression, and a significance which most of us yearn for but are helpless to acquire.

If the chief business of life is the transmutation of experience into character, then the precisely analogous process in literature—that of transforming memories into phrases expressive of one's inmost character—is of similar importance. In novels, or in poetry, too often, this process is but dimly perceptible. In the familiar writings of such a man as Samuel Clemens it is seen plainly at work.

It is wonderful in reading these letters to see how all manner of things—things commonplace, things tragic, things irritating, things obscure, are transformed and refined and made to contribute to the merriment or to the spiritual value of life by the magic of Mark Twain's point of view. How the homely words, flying straight to

the point, stimulate and reconcile, and emphasize the burden and the privilege of living!

Mark Twain's letters seem to contain experience and emotion and thought enough to fill several ordinary lifetimes. Through them one gets the oddest, the most varied glimpses of the spectacle of human life. Through them one is able to share in more events and situations than the most generously planned novel could well be made to contain.

But of Mark Twain in his letters, as in his books, we never weary. His personality never loses its hold upon us, because it is always at work doing for us what it is the chief office of a great personality in literature to do—making life more livable for us by communicating to us its sense of humor and its sense of tragedy.

And so it involves no disparagement of Mark Twain as an artist to place the volumes containing his collected letters among his greatest works.

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ADVENTURES AND LETTERS OF RICHARD HARDING DAVIS. Edited by Charles Belmont Davis. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1917.

The presumption that a man so variously experienced, so widely acquainted with all sorts and conditions of men, so keenly observing, as was Richard Harding Davis, must have had much more to tell than he actually did tell in any of his writings intended for the public, is doubtless strong enough in itself to awaken anticipatory interest in his posthumously published letters. But there are not a few who will be drawn to the perusal of Davis's letters by something more than the promise of "adventures" in the title of the volume which contains them. The creator of "Van Bibber" and of "McWilliams" certainly endeared himself to a large public—and especially, perhaps, to that portion of his original public which is now approaching forty years of age. One does not envy the man—if such there is—who in youth could not grow sentimental over *Phroso* or who did not believe, for a time at least, that *Soldiers of Fortune* was the best story ever written. Never to have relished the full flavor of the Van Bibber stories, with their sophistication and their chivalrous sentiment, is to have missed something out of one's life. Romance has a way of fading, to be sure, and perhaps it is inevitable that even those earlier tales of Davis's should lose their freshness—though *Gallagher* turns out, upon re-reading, to be as wonderful a short-story as it originally seemed. At all events, those who fell in love with "Hope Langham" or grinned over "McWilliams" in their teens received an emotional stimulus very nearly as wholesome as it was pleasurable—an experience that is to be remembered with gratitude.

And so a great many persons who had no acquaintance with Davis will approach the reading of his letters with friendly interest.

Richard Harding Davis as a boy longed to become a writer, and he never thought of any other profession than authorship. "He never," his brother tells us, "even wanted to go to sea, or be a bare-back rider in a circus." He planned his career. After his graduation from Lehigh University he prepared for his life-work by taking special studies in Johns Hopkins, and as soon as his academic training was over he set zestfully about the accumulation of literary material and the acquirement of journalistic experience. In 1886, when he